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Hobart ET Committee at UN Decol. Committee

HOBART EAST TIMOR COMMITTEE
2/65 Bay Rd, New Town, Tasmania, Australia

Petition to the United Nations Select Committee of 24 on East Timor

Presented by Alyn Ware

New York, July 13, 1994

Your Excellency, Respected Members of this Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to again present a Petition to these Hearings. Like everyone desiring peace and justice for East Timor we regret that a solution has not been achieved 19 years after Indonesia's invasion and we ask that the United Nations be as willing to impose tough measures, including sanctions, to achieve compliance with all Security Council and General Assembly Resolutions, as it has been in other situations of invasion.

We would like to speak briefly on the reasons which prompted Indonesia to invade East Timor in 1975 and the extent to which those reasons are still impacting on the search for peace.

The most publicised claim in 1975 was that East Timor was "going Communist." But, even if by some miracle every one of East Timor's 680,000 people had "gone Communist" in the space of 20 months, it could have had little impact on Indonesia which numbered its "Communists" in the millions.(1)

In 1974 Indonesia began its clandestine program to destabilize and, if that failed, to invade East Timor, and this plan was formulated at a time when East Timor's two major political parties were working together harmoniously and productively towards the shared ideal of independence.

Former Australian Consul in East Timor, James Dunn, has written of this period "One could not help but be struck by the relaxed and happy atmosphere prevailing in the towns and villages, as well as the spirit of tolerance and the optimism among the politically active Timorese."(2)

There are grounds to suggest that Indonesia was worried that East Timor was "going independent," not that it was "going Communist." Yet, if Indonesia's Foreign Minister, Adam Malik, had meant his 1974 assurance to East Timor that "whoever will govern in Timor in the future after independence, can be assured that the government of Indonesia will always strive to maintain good relations, friendship and cooperation for the benefit of both countries"(3), then harmony in East Timor should have been a matter for rejoicing.

In 1975 the surrounding areas of Indonesia - West Timor, Alor, Ambon, Wetar and so on - were among the poorest and most neglected parts of Indonesia. Massive amounts of aid were flowing into Indonesia but very little of it was reaching the outer islands. It was easy to find untreated cases of leprosy, malaria and tuberculosis; there were schools without staff or books; there were islands without paved roads or wharves,

An independent East Timor, eligible for a wide range of United Nations and bilateral aid packages, was seen by Jakarta as a threat because it could exacerbate existing discontent in the South Moluccas and nearby islands. But the answer to this potential problem lay not in invading East Timor but in giving greater respect and support to the aspirations of the people living in the most neglected parts of Indonesia.

When the Australian Council for Overseas Aid assessed the situation in East Timor in late 1975 they wrote that "the actual level of external assistance required to maintain an independent East Timor in the future would be remarkably small (at least compared to a country such as Indonesia, which will this year require some $2,800 million in loans and grants)-"(4)

Indonesia could find millions of dollars towards the cost of invading East Timor but could not find the money to provide Dapsone treatment for its many leprosy victims in West Timor.

There in a widespread belief that Indonesia wanted East Timor so as to use it as a "training ground," and its behaviour both before and after the invasion supports this belief.

When Indonesia, in the early 1960s, began dropping paratroopers into Dutch New Guinea, in a campaign masterminded by Major-General (now President) Suharto, it was a fiasco. The indigenous people preferred to support Dutch efforts to prepare them for independence in 10 years' time rather than believe in Indonesian rhetoric and simply handed captured Indonesian troops to the Dutch authorities, But it became a diplomatic success when the United States chose to support Indonesia rather than Holland.

Understandably, Indonesia then began planning to take over North Borneo. Suharto again played a vital role in this campaign plan.(5) But Britain chose to support the young nation of Malaysia and the campaign became a military and diplomatic failure.

So it is understandable that Suharto and his generals saw the small nation of East Timor as a means to restore some prestige to Indonesia's military. East Timor had no navy, no air force, and an army of 5,000 men. In fact, the entire called-up strength of the Indonesia army was greater than the total population of East Timor, The Indonesian military was so confident of success that it dropped leaflets into East Timor claiming it would control the country within five days.

In 1975 Portugal, like South Africa, was regarded by the Non-Aligned world as an "evil empire" because of its desire to hold on to its African colonies. President Suharto could boost his position within the Non-Aligned Movement by appearing to act against Portuguese colonialism in Timor. But it was not the Portuguese colonists who were bombed, shot, napalmed, tortured, raped and terrorized, but the indigenous people of East Timor colonised by Portugal.

It is to the lasting credit of the Portuguese-speaking nations of Africa that they have persistently worked to overcome this misconception and promote the right of the East Timorese people to self-determination.

It is no longer a secret that the American and Australian Intelligence services monitored every stop of Indonesia's covert de-stabilisation and invasion plans - and not only made no attempt to stop Indonesia or to raise the matter within the United Nations but actually supported, encouraged and helped to finance Indonesia's brutal takeover of East Timor. A CIA operative in Jakarta in 1975(6) has revealed that as well as weaponry the United States also provided material such as soldiers' uniforms.

It is not hard to understand why. The United States was facing defeat and withdrawal in Indo-China. Indonesia was offering it the opportunity to be associated with a military success, as well as the chance to be seen as a still-effective anti-Communist crusader.

Which then of these reasons remains as an impediment?

President Suharto, despite the slaughter in East Timor, Went Papua, and Aceh, and his defiance of 2 United Nations Security Council Resolutions, has achieved his ambition to become leader of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Regardless of how he and his generals feel about past military fiascoes it must be clear to them that there is no military glory to be gained by killing defenceless people in East Timor. Although East Timor remains a "training ground," a way to rapid promotion, and a way for the Indonesian military to augment their pay through a variety of corrupt practices.

The number of Indonesians still listed as "Communists" continues to exceed the total population of East Timor -- so that, clearly, East Timor has had no influence on what Indonesia regards as its "Communist threat."

The poverty of the eastern islands of Indonesia has only been addressed marginally. It is still not difficult to find untreated leprosy, malaria and tuberculosis; there are still villages without clean water or sanitation; there are still communities without access to anything but the most minimal education,

Indonesia continues to claim it is "developing" East Timor. In 1966 a group of donor nations (the Intergovernmental Group on Indonesia) agreed to provide Indonesia with $500 million to help overcome the "chaos of the Sukarno years." Each year since then the amount of assistance required by Indonesia has increased to where it is now over $5 billion a year. It is debatable whether Indonesia can afford to "develop" East Timor when its own needs for outside assistance are so great. And to channel some of this assistance to East Timor through Indonesia's massive and corrupt bureaucracy is an extremely inefficient and inappropriate way of providing assistance to East Timor.

The United States has begun to withdraw moral support and practical assistance from Indonesia's military. And there are progressively fewer places in the world where Indonesians can be "safe" from embarrassing questions on East Timor.

Within East Timor itself Indonesia has made sure that resistance will continue -- because the only truly Timorese thing left to the East Timorese people is their struggle for identity and independence. Indonesians are taking over Timorese land; Timorese possessions are regularly "expropriated" by the Indonesian army; Indonesians have now taken control of all of East Timor's resources; Timorese languages are banned; Timorese culture is being undermined and derided; Timorese families and communities are broken up and dispossessed; and even the Timorese church is having Indonesian priests foisted upon it.

There are many powerful legal and moral reasons why the United Nations should be willing to be as active in last Timor as it has been in Cambodia, Bosnia, and elsewhere. Perhaps too, in this "Year of the family," more attention can be paid to Indonesia's cynical destruction of East Timor's once rich and supportive clan, family and community structures.

The Matebian Encirclement of 1976 and 1977 was as horrific as anything which has occurred in Bosnia but there was no media to film it and it was not followed by active United Nations intervention.

Instead it was followed by massive famine, the brutal "Fence of Legs" campaign, the Kraras and Lacluta Massacres, the forcible removal of much of the population from their traditional lands, the deliberate poisoning of at least 200 Timorese children - and, in 1991, when the Dili Massacre was shown around the world we were reminded that this tragedy came more than 30 years after the United Nations took responsibility for East Timor's decolonisation and 16 years after the United Nations Security Council specifically requested "Indonesia to withdraw without further delay all its forces from the territory,"(7)

Thank you.

Background Notes:

(1) In 1960 the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) claimed to have 3 million members. In 1971 1,900,000 people were banned from voting in Indonesian elections because of their alleged links with the PKI. In 1990 Indonesia had 1.4 million People listed an "ex-PKI" but over 8 million Indonesians continue to suffer various forms of discrimination because of their alleged links to the PKI.

(2) James Dunn "Timor: A People Betrayed."

(3) Letter from Adam Malik, given to Jose Ramos Horta, for publication in East Timor in 1974.

(4) ACFOA Report on Visit to East Timor for the ACFOA Timor Task Force, October 1975,

(5) See e.g. Brian May "The Indonesian Tragedy."

(6) See e.g. John Pilger "Death of a Nation."

(7) U.N. Security Council Resolutions 384 and 389.

All figures in US dollars, IGGI has now become the Consultative Group on Indonesia (CGI).